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Administration shunts aside House vote to end covert aid

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WASHINGTON — The Reagan Administration reacted Friday with official "disappointment" to a House vote that would cut off covert aid for Nicaraguan insurgents, but said the action would have no effect on the President's policies.

"Will it affect our policy?" asked State Department Spokesman John Hughes, at a noon briefing. "No."

"At this point, the House [bill] does not represent legislation which has passed through the full cycle of congressional consideration," Hughes added. "The closeness of the vote does not represent a definitive judgment on administration policies."

A statement issued by the White House repeated the administration's opposition to congressional limitations on Reagan's ability to carry out his foreign policy.

"We were disappointed by the House passage of the resolution and have opposed any legislation which would constrain the executive's flexibility and policy tools to deal with the extremely complex situa-

tion in Central America," the White House statement said.

Split along party lines, the House voted, 228-195, Thursday night to cut off funding for covert activities within Nicaragua.

In a telephone interview from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, a leader of the principal CIA-backed guerilla force called the vote "materially inconsequential."

"It doesn't stop anything," said Adolfo Calero, a civilian leader of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force.

"The struggle for democracy in Nicaragua is several decades old, and has continued with our without friends," Calero added.

In Washington, a National Security Council (NSC) official called the vote an "unhelpful" signal and predicted that it would cause Nicaragua's Sandinista leaders to harden their position in future negotiations on the conflicts in Central America.

"[The vote] is a psychological blow to our allies and a boost to our foes, allowing the latter to be less

forthcoming and more intransigent," the official said.

The NSC official played down reports that plans to expand covert operations against the Sandinistas have created dissension within the CIA. "You can always find people disagreeing on any issue," the official said.

The CIA privately has advised the congressional intelligence oversight committees that it plans to merge the three main anti-Sandinista fighting forces into one 15,000-man army.

While the Administration expressed dismay at the House action, opponents of Reagan's Central America policies saw it as a sign that the nation wants to avoid war.

House Speaker Thomas (Tip) O'Neill (D., Mass.) called the vote "a message to [Reagan] that we want negotiations."

Said O'Neill: "If there's ever a time that's right to sit down at the diplomatic table, now's the time."

Morton Halperin, who was an

NSC official in the Nixon Administration and now monitors Central America for the American Civil Liberties Union, said the vote reflected a growing worry in the House and among Americans that Reagan's policies could lead to war.

"People don't know very much about Central America," Halperin said. "They have to ask which country is which. But they do know there is a danger of war and they don't want Americans getting killed."

How They Voted

WASHINGTON — (AP) — Here's how Florida's House delegation lined up in the 228-195 vote to cut off secret U.S. aid to Nicaraguan rebels. A "yes" vote is a vote to cut off the aid. Voting yes were 210 Democrats and 18 Republicans; voting no were 50 Democrats and 145 Republicans.

Democrats — Bennett, yes; Chappell, no; Fascell, no; Fuqua, no; Gibbons, yes; Hutto, no; Ireland, no; Lehman, yes; MacKay, yes; Mica, no; Nelson, no; Pepper, yes; Smith, yes.
Republicans — Bilirakis, no; Lewis, no; Mack, no; McCollum, no; Shaw, no; Young, no.